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Note verbale dated 22 August 2018 from the Permanent Mission of Austria to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

The Permanent Mission of Austria to the United Nations presents its compliments to the President of the General Assembly and has the honour to refer to the candidature of Austria to the Human Rights Council for the period 2019–2021 for the elections to be held during the seventy-third session.

In accordance with General Assembly resolution 60/251, the Permanent Mission has the further honour to transmit herewith the voluntary pledges and commitments reaffirming that the promotion and protection of all human rights are a core priority of the foreign policy of Austria (see annex).

The Permanent Mission would be grateful if the present note and its annex could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under item 117 (d) of the provisional agenda.

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Annex to the note verbale dated 22 August 2018 from the Permanent Mission of Austria to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

Candidature of Austria to the Human Rights Council, 2019–2021

Voluntary pledges and commitments pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/251

I. Building bridges for human rights

1. Austria is entirely committed to the full respect of human rights at the national and international levels. Austrian policies are guided by the conviction that human rights are universal, indivisible, interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Austria is convinced that the promotion and protection of all human rights worldwide must be facilitated through partnership and dialogue with all relevant actors. The greatest challenges of our time — ranging from the protection of media freedom to the management of large movements of refugees and migrants — can be overcome only through effective multilateral mechanisms based on full respect for international law and in cooperation with the international human rights system.

2. Austria has long been committed to developing and strengthening international human rights protection within the United Nations framework. The activities of Austria within the international community have always been centred around its political neutrality and its extensive tradition of building bridges across cultural, ethnic, ideological and religious boundaries. In this spirit, Austria hosted the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993, as well as several follow-up events. During its chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2017, Austria focused on the fight against radicalization and extremism, addressing crucial aspects such as freedom of religion and assembly, freedom of expression and the safety of journalists, gender equality, the protection of minorities, tackling hate speech and cybersecurity, with a view to advancing the discussion on these issues. Furthermore, Austria proactively contributed to the promotion of human rights within the United Nations as Chair of the Commission for Social Development at its fifty-fifth session and as Chair of the Committee on Information in 2017, as well as in its role as facilitator of the negotiations for the political declaration of the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

3. The Human Rights Council plays a leading role in developing and strengthening human rights protection worldwide. In that regard, Austria has decided to announce its candidature to the Council for the period 2019–2021. Austria is proud to declare that it has essentially implemented the pledges and commitments related to its candidature to the Council for the period 2011–2014. With a view to making the selection of members of the Council as transparent as possible, and in accordance with General Assembly resolution 60/251, Austria presents its new pledges and commitments below.

II. International cooperation

4. Austria is committed to open, transparent and cross-regional international cooperation and will continue to serve as a place of dialogue and cooperation for the promotion of human rights.

5. Austria has repeatedly demonstrated its dedication to the international human rights system and was a member of the Council for the first time from 2011 to 2014.

With its renewed membership of the Council, Austria will intensify its commitment and contribute to the full implementation of the mandate of the Council. Austria reaffirms its goal of rendering the work of the Council more effective and supports efforts to further strengthen the Council in a transparent manner and in collaboration with all Member States.

6. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action of 1993 continue to be of immense importance for international human rights protection and served as a basis for the creation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Austria remains determined in its support of an independent OHCHR and will continue and intensify its ongoing engagement with and support for that Office.

7. Austria fully cooperates with all international and regional human rights monitoring mechanisms and fulfils its periodic reporting obligations. It has extended a general invitation to all special rapporteurs and other human rights mechanisms to visit Austria and will continue to support their vital work and the work of the human rights treaty bodies. Austria places great emphasis on the universal periodic review. It is currently implementing the recommendations adopted during the second cycle of the universal periodic review and will provide the Council with an interim report thereon. The report for the third cycle of the universal periodic review, just as with previous reviews, will be prepared in a transparent procedure with the involvement of civil society.

8. In line with its long-standing tradition, Austria will continue to build bridges to develop and strengthen the international regime for the protection of human rights at the United Nations and other organizations. It will use its experience to openly and transparently promote cross-regional cooperation and to contribute to the understanding of the shared responsibility of Council members to develop and strengthen international human rights protection. Recognizing the significant contribution of civil society to the promotion of human rights and to the work of the human rights system of the United Nations, Austria will maintain its cooperation with and support for civil society at the national and international levels. To that effect, Austria will also continue to clearly oppose reprisals against human rights defenders.

9. First and foremost, Austria will remain committed to its current human rights priorities. At the Council and the General Assembly, Austria will continue to actively support initiatives to promote the rights of minorities, freedom of speech and the safety of journalists, the human rights of internally displaced persons and human rights in the administration of justice. Austria is determined to intensify cross-regional cooperation to further pursue these initiatives.

10. Austria will continue its cooperation to strengthen the rights of women, children and persons with disabilities, the rule of law and the promotion of human rights education, and to fight against trafficking in persons, racism and discrimination. In addition, the global abolition of the death penalty remains a priority of Austrian foreign policy.

11. One of the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies. This goal is at the heart of Austrian development cooperation, through which Austria supports its partners in Africa, Asia, Latin America and South-Eastern and Eastern Europe in their sustainable social, economic and democratic development and in strengthening the rule of law. Austrian development cooperation is devoted to a human rights-based approach, which is implemented as a guiding principle in its international programmes and projects as well as in political dialogue, with a focus on humanitarian aid, the fight against poverty, cooperation in the area of migration, gender equality, and the rights of the child and of persons with disabilities. This is reflected through specific programmes

and projects for bilateral cooperation, as well as in the support for institutions such as OHCHR, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. Austria will continue to further strengthen these efforts.

12. At the United Nations and in regional organizations, such as the Council of Europe and OSCE, the human rights policy of Austria is founded on the principles of partnership, objectivity and pluralism. The efforts of Austria are centred around dialogue with all stakeholders and aimed at partnership-based solutions to problems, with a view to overcoming differences, improving the protection of human rights worldwide and promoting positive change in people's lives. Within the European Union, Austria advocates a consistent human rights policy within and outside the Union.

13. Austria has a long and successful tradition of intercultural and interreligious dialogue. In dialogue activities, great emphasis is placed on strengthening the role of women and the inclusion of young people. Highest priority is given to issues of social, cultural and religious pluralism, democracy-building and respect for human rights, including freedom of religion. Austria will continue to intensify its efforts to promote intercultural dialogue and freedom of religion.

III. Commitment of Austria to the protection of human rights

14. Austria is committed to promoting a human rights policy that ensures the respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights at the national level also. It has ratified and implemented all major international human rights treaties. In Austria, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms holds the status of constitutional law, and the actions of the State, its courts and its administrative authorities are directly guided by the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights. Furthermore, the rights guaranteed under the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union are used to evaluate Austria on the issue of human rights within the scope of European Union law.

15. Ensuring and protecting human rights is also understood by Austria as a dynamic process that, owing to an ever-changing level of social awareness, must be constantly developed. The framework conditions created for the integration of refugees and migrants will be further improved through, among other things, support and advice, including on fundamental and human rights. At the national level, Austria intends, inter alia, to take measures to expand the legal protection of children. In implementing Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)5 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to member States, the Government has commissioned independent experts to engage with various stakeholder groups and review the country's record on safeguarding Internet freedom. The national action plan on disability covering the period from 2012 to 2020 is being evaluated and may be extended until 2030 based on the results of the evaluation.

16. In revising its code of conduct for the prevention of corruption and developing a national action plan based on its national anti-corruption strategy, Austria will adapt and expand measures to prevent and combat corruption to comply with current standards.

17. In Austria, the courts, in particular the Constitutional Court, ensure that constitutional rights are respected. The role of the Constitutional Court will be further strengthened through the introduction of a mandatory preliminary ruling procedure

that must be followed before the holding of binding referendums, under the conditions set out in the government programme to ensure compliance with fundamental rights as well as international and European Union law. The Government is also committed to a further concretization of the rights arising from the constitutional guarantee to a fair trial. In addition, several independent supervisory bodies monitor the implementation of and respect for human rights at the national level.

18. The Austrian Ombudsman Board is the country's national human rights institution. It addresses grievances against administrative bodies, including alleged human rights violations. Since 2012, it has also undertaken preventative activities in relation to detention facilities, along with its six independent commissions. In Parliament, a committee on human rights routinely addresses current human rights issues. Austria will evaluate and further develop its national security authorities in accordance with international models. Legal protection will be developed to the highest standards following the structural model of the Board.

19. Austria places particular emphasis on the involvement of civil society in the promotion of human rights. Consequently, the Government and the authorities are engaged in continuous dialogue with civil society and they value the engagement and technical expertise demonstrated by many civil society organizations, which contribute substantially to the relevance of the work carried out by national and international human rights mechanisms.

20. In cooperation with national and international stakeholders, the Austrian national contact point for the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises will continue to pursue its activities in a proactive manner and with a strengthened focus on human rights, and it will continue to play a key role as a platform for dialogue and arbitration in respect of human rights issues related to the cross-border activities of Austrian companies.